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SUBJECT: FEMALE LOCAL COUNCIL QUOTA EXPECTED TO BE
ANNOUNCED AT DECEMBER CONFERENCE

1. (U) SUMMARY: At a signing ceremony on October 9 for a USAID grant for women's rights projects, Minister of Human Rights Amat al-Alim Soswa conveyed invitations for several high-ranking current and former USG officials to a December conference in Sanaa on women's issues in the Arab world. She said that at the conference, President Saleh is expected to announce a quota of 20 percent female representation in upcoming local council (LC) elections. In view of the home-grown nature of the conference and of Soswa's efforts, with considerable USG support, to increase the enfranchisement and political participation of women, Post encourages the attendance of a suitable USG representative at this conference. End Summary

2. (U) On October 9, Ambassador Krajewski and MHR Soswa, together with Flavia Pansieri, Resident Representative of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), signed a USAID grant for \$463,300 to support women's rights programs under Ministry of Human Rights auspices.

3. (U) Following the ceremony, Soswa conveyed to the Ambassador formal invitations for Secretary Rice, former Secretary Albright, and Senator Clinton to a conference

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entitled "Women's Rights in the Arab World: From Words to Deeds." The conference, to be held in Sanaa on December 3-5, is being organized in collaboration with the UNDP. Soswa urged high-level USG representation at the conference.

4. (U) Excerpted text of the invitation reads: "The proposed conference will provide a platform for the exchange of experiences and discussions on issues related to the empowerment of women in the Arab world and their participation in public life [and] will cover three main themes: women and political participation, women as clients of justice, and women as providers of justice. Therefore, it is with great pleasure that I would like to invite you to attend and participate as a keynote speaker in this important regional conference. As the undersecretary [sic] of state and one of the most prominent female international figures, your participation in this conference whose main themes are women and political participation and women and justice, is most fitting."

5. (U) Soswa also said that at the conference Saleh intends to announce a 20 percent female representation quota for the 2006 LC elections. She noted that this announcement requires no changes to the law and that the two primary opposition parties, Islah and the Yemen Socialist Party, have already agreed in principle to the quota. Soswa acknowledged that the outcome likely would be less than 20 percent in many regions, notwithstanding an announced quota, as there are few women prepared to run for office in some tribal areas.

6. (SBU) COMMENT: Post recommends that a suitable USG representative attend this conference. The conference is a home-grown initiative and merits USG support particularly in light of the prospective increase in local female political participation if President Saleh's announcement transpires as anticipated by Soswa. In view of Soswa's past efforts on behalf of the USG and the cause of human right, as well as her efforts to increase the enfranchisement and political participation of women, this conference merits high-level representation to increase her credibility and to demonstrate the USG commitment to human rights in the region. End comment.

KRAJESKI